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AMAZING WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY

A Book of Answers for Kids



SUE HEINEMANN

**THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
AMAZING WOMEN
IN AMERICAN HISTORY**
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Sue Heinemann

A Stonesong Press Book



JOSSEY-BASS

A Wiley Imprint

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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 www.josseybass.com

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Heinemann, Sue.

The New York Public Library amazing women in American history: a book of answers for kids / Sue Heinemann.

p. cm. — (New York Public Library answer books for kids series)

"A Stonesong Press book."

Includes index.

Summary: Consists of short answers to questions about the roles and achievements of women in America from prehistory to the end of the twentieth century.

ISBN 0-471-19216-3 (alk. paper)

1. Women—United States—History—Juvenile literature.
2. Questions and answers—Juvenile literature. [1. Women—History—Miscellanea.
2. Women—Social conditions—Miscellanea. 3. Women's rights—Miscellanea.
4. Women—Biography. 5. Questions and answers.] I. Title. II. Series.

HQ1410.H43 1998

973'.082—dc21

97-18465

FIRST EDITION

PB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

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989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 www.josseybass.com

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

What did women do during the Revolutionary War? When did the U.S. movement for women's rights begin? Who were Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, and Eleanor Roosevelt?

There are hundreds of questions to ask about the history of women in the United States, and thousands of amazing women to learn about. With *The New York Public Library Amazing Women in American History*, you can quickly find answers to many of the most important questions and meet some of the incredible women who helped shape U.S. history.

The New York Public Library Amazing Women in American History is only an introduction to the many contributions women have made to our history. It would take a whole library of books to tell the full story! But the information in this book offers a good start for an exciting exploration of the many different ways women have enriched our history — in politics, education, religion, the arts, and other areas.

Let the questions and answers in this book spark your curiosity and suggest new questions and new subjects to investigate. Then do your own research. Check out the bibliography and the suggested reading list for additional sources of information. Also take a trip to the library. The New York Public Library and other libraries all over the country have both books and computers filled with amazing facts that you can discover on your own. Ask the librarian if you need some help locating the information you want. We hope that this book will lead you on your own exciting investigation of women's history and will encourage you to use your local library.

THE FIRST AMERICAN WOMEN (PREHISTORIC TIMES - 1760)

Who were the first women in America?

Archaeologists have discovered that people lived in America at least 12,000 to 15,000 years ago, and perhaps even 40,000 years ago. These people probably came from Siberia, traveling across a bridge of frozen land that once existed between Russia and Alaska. Over thousands of years, their descendants moved south and east, settling throughout the Americas and giving birth to the many different Native American peoples.

What was life like for early Native American women?

Not much is known about the first women, who probably moved with their families from place to place in search of food. As Native Americans settled in different areas, women helped farm the land, from preparing the soil to harvesting corn and other vegetables. To store the food and carry water, they created beautiful baskets and pottery with artistic patterns. Some women even designed and built their homes, such as the **tipis** made by Plains women.

How important were women in Native American societies?

Indian creation myths suggest that women have always had important roles in Native American cultures. Many societies were **matrilineal**, tracing their ancestry

Spear points from 10,000 to 11,000 years ago have been discovered in present-day Colorado and New Mexico, and there are signs of equally old wood-post dwellings in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.



This Edward Curtis photograph (c.1920) shows Native American Hopi women preparing cornmeal as their ancestors have done for thousands of years.

through women called **clan mothers**. In some groups the right to hold office was inherited from the mother. Among the Iroquois and Cherokee, women sat on decision-making councils, and clan mothers nominated chiefs and could overthrow them.

Were any women chiefs?

When the first Europeans arrived in America, they encountered several female rulers. One was the **cacica** (chief) of Cutifachiqui, in what is now Georgia. Around 1540 she greeted the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and gave him pearls and other gifts. De Soto then turned on her, took her captive, and used her as a guide as he marched north. But the cacica was clever and escaped after two weeks. She took with her some of the most valuable pearls.

When did European women arrive in America?

The first European woman in America was Francesca Hinestrosa of Spain. She joined her husband on de Soto's expedition from Florida through Georgia and the Carolinas and then west, across the Appalachians toward the Mississippi. She was killed in an attack by Chickasaw warriors in 1541. Later, in 1565, Spanish women helped settle Saint Augustine in Florida. There, in 1566, Señora Argüelles gave birth to a boy, the first known child of European parents in what is now the United States.

One of the first European maps of the Southwest was based on a drawing made in the dirt in 1542 by a Wichita woman known as Big Eyes.

When did the first women come from England?

In 1587 about 120 British colonists, including 17 women and several children, settled on Roanoke Island in what was then called Virginia (now North Carolina). There Virginia Dare, the first American child of English parents, was born on August 18, 1587. What happened to her, as well as the rest of the colonists, is a mystery. Nine days after her birth, her grandfather, the colony's governor, set sail for England. When he returned three years later, there was no one on the island. Some people believe that the settlers died in an Indian attack; others say that they moved to the mainland and intermarried with Native Americans there.

Who were the first permanent English women settlers?

In 1608, a year after the founding of the Jamestown settlement in Virginia, Anne Forrest joined her husband there. With her was her 13-year-old maid, Anne Buras. In the next

The Goddess Stories

In several different Native American creation stories, the world is brought into existence by a woman. The Keres Indians and the Navajo speak of Thinking Woman, also called Spider Woman, who "thought the earth, the sky, the galaxy, and all that is into being," in the words of

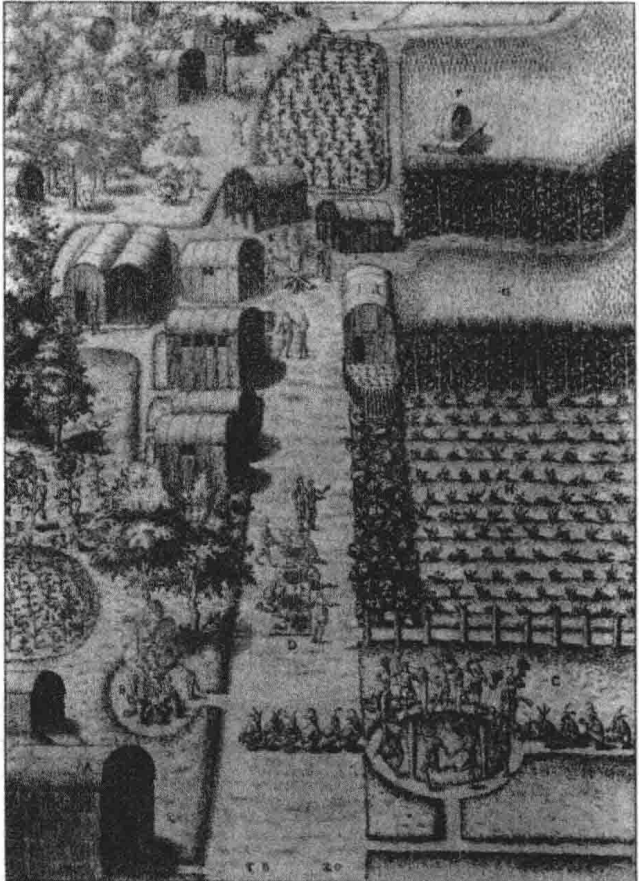
writer Paula Gunn Allen. The Iroquois tell of Sky Woman, who fell through the sky from another world and eventually found herself on the back of a turtle. There, in the layer of earth covering the turtle's back, she planted the tree of life.

In the early 1600s Iroquois women stopped all love-making until men gave them the right to decide between war and peace. It didn't take the men long to agree.

year about 120 more women arrived in Jamestown, but many died from starvation, illness, or Indian attacks.

What is the real story of Pocahontas?

Pocahontas was the daughter of Powhatan, the most powerful chief in the area the English called Virginia. She was about 12 or 13 in 1607, when the Jamestown settlement was founded. That same year she supposedly begged her father not to kill Captain John Smith, a Jamestown leader, after he was captured as a presumed enemy. Six years later Pocahontas was taken hostage by the British to give them more power in negotiations with Powhatan. Brought to Jamestown, she converted to Christianity and married the colonist John Rolfe in 1614, possibly to help keep peace between her people and the British. In 1617 Pocahontas (now called Rebecca) died in England, where she had been introduced to the queen.



A Native American village near Jamestown, as depicted by an English settler, shows carefully tended crops and buildings. Native American women were often in charge of most of the farming for their community.

Were there any African women in Jamestown?

In 1619 the first Africans, including three women, were brought to British America. They arrived in Jamestown as **indentured servants**, who had to work for their "masters" for a set number of years but then gained their freedom. Within the next few decades, however, more and more Africans were forced into slavery. In Spanish America (Florida, Mexico, Cuba, and other lands held by the Spanish), slavery began much earlier, with some of the first settlements.

Were any white women slaves?

White women were not sold as slaves, but many poor English women agreed to work for five to seven years as indentured servants in return for payment for their trip to America. They helped with farmwork and in the household. Afterward they usually married.

Was it easy for white women to find husbands in America?

At first, many more men came to America than women, and wives were much in demand. Some women were even imported as wives. In 1620 about ninety British women landed in Jamestown to be "sold" as wives. Men rushed to pay the 120 pounds of tobacco (about \$80) that the shipowners charged for transporting a wife.

When did the Pilgrim women arrive?

The *Mayflower*, with eighteen women and eleven girls among its passengers, landed at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts in 1620. Mary Chilton was the first woman to step ashore. Many of the women died during the first, bitterly cold winter, but all the girls survived.

What kinds of work did women settlers do?

In addition to helping with the farming, women cooked and baked and preserved food for the winter. They made their family's clothes by spinning, weaving, and stitching by hand. They also made candles, soap, and other household supplies. Women served as **midwives**, assisting

Colonial women cooked their families' meals over an open fire in a huge fireplace. For baking, they used a tightly covered cast-iron kettle, known as a Dutch oven, which was hooked onto a crane and swung over the fire.

mothers when they gave birth to their children. Women also took care of the children.

Did any women run their own farms or businesses?

Although married women could not own property in the British colonies, they helped keep the farm and family businesses going. They might shoe horses, operate a printing press, or look after a store. The wives of traders, especially in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (now New York), often took charge of farms or businesses when their husbands were away. In addition, widows and unmarried women, who could own property, sometimes managed estates.

Did any women serve in colonial governments?

Women settlers generally had no role in government. One exception was Lady Deborah Moody of England, who in 1643 became the first woman to head a colonial settlement. Desiring religious freedom, she and her followers started a community in what is now Brooklyn, New York. Lady Moody received a charter from the Dutch for the town and helped set up its government.

Were early women settlers religious?

Many early immigrants, such as the **Puritans** in Massachusetts, came to America in order to practice their religion freely. Puritan ministers often praised women for

The Woman Who Saved Maryland

In 1638 Margaret Brent received a land grant in Maryland and set up a successful plantation with her sister Mary. Margaret Brent often went to court to carry out legal transactions for herself and others. In 1647, when Lord Calvert, the governor of Maryland, was dying, he put her in charge of his estate. At the time the governor's soldiers were about

to rebel because they had not been paid. Brent calmed them and found a way to pay them, saving Maryland from a revolt. The Maryland assembly later praised her efforts. But when she asked for two votes in the assembly because she owned her property and was also in charge of Lord Calvert's estate, the assembly turned her down.

An Early Poet

Anne Bradstreet was 18 when she came to Massachusetts from England in 1630. While raising eight children and doing all the work of a female settler, she wrote her poems. In 1650, without her consent, her brother-in-law took some of her poems to London and had them published. This volume, *The Tenth*

Muse Lately Sprung Up in America, was the first book published by an American woman. Another book of her poems was published after her death. In one poem, to her husband, she wrote: "If ever two were one then surely we. / If ever man were loved by wife, then thee."

their devotion to God and their religious obedience. The Puritans did not, however, believe that these good women should speak in church or preach in any way. In contrast, the **Quakers**, who settled mostly in Pennsylvania, allowed women to be ministers.

Did any Puritan women try to preach?

At meetings in her home in Boston, Anne Hutchinson claimed that many of the Puritan preachers were wrong and that it was not good deeds but God's grace that would save people. When some influential men became her followers, the church authorities grew alarmed. By emphasizing each person's direct link to God, she threatened the power of the clergy. In 1637–38 she was put on trial for going against the ministers, found guilty, and banished from the Massachusetts colony. She went to Rhode Island and later to New Netherland (now New York), where she was killed by Indians.

Did other women stand up for their religious beliefs?

Almost all the early women who made a strong stand for religious freedom were Quakers. Some Quaker women became missionaries and traveled outside the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania to convert others to their faith. In Massachusetts, where only the Puritan faith was permitted, several Quaker women missionaries were put in prison or

Quaker women held their own business meetings; one of their main duties was to determine if a couple was ready for marriage.